



# ESPERANZA USA

## PACTO DE ESPERANZA AIDS IN THE HISPANIC CHURCH

Does HIV/AIDS exist in our Latino church family? Does it exist among our clergy? Does it exist among our church leaders? **Yes! HIV, the virus that causes AIDS, has impacted our church families.**

While ministering in a public hospital, the chaplain was called to provide communion for a dying AIDS patient who was alone. When chaplain Rodríguez inquired about his faith tradition, the patient explained that he used to be a pastor of a charismatic congregation. The chaplain asked if he wanted him to contact the members of the congregation. The patient responded, "Please don't call anybody because if they ever find out what I have my wife will be ostracized. The truth is that not even my kids know." Only his wife visited the patient and towards the end of his life her visits became more infrequent as she was afraid of being seen in the AIDS unit by any of the church members. As he experienced his loneliness the chaplain helped him speak about his feelings. "How are you feeling today?" "As usual, alone. But that is what happened to Jesus isn't it? At night I see him on the cross and he repeats over and over my feelings, 'My God, why have you forsaken me?'" Two months later the patient died abandoned by his church, family and friends.

Likewise, the Gonzalez' a lay missionary couple from a mainline denomination, returned from the field to attend to medical needs and discovered that he was infected. His wife was pregnant and upon being tested the exam was positive for HIV. When the child was born she was born HIV positive. The denomination stripped them of their credentials and removed all financial benefits including health insurance. Within the next four years both parents died. A couple from the home church adopted the toddler. They contacted a fostering agency to find out if they could contract the disease from the child. Once educated about HIV/AIDS they took guardianship of the child. Many nights they comforted the child who missed her parents by holding her in their arms and whispering in her ear, "The Lord is my shepherd, he will always care for me."

**These stories clearly show that our church; our families, lay leaders and clergy; the body of Christ, are living with HIV/AIDS! Of all Hispanics living with AIDS in the United States:**

- Hispanic children account for 23% of all pediatric AIDS cases.
- In 2001, of all the new cases of HIV/AIDS reported 19% were Hispanics while we compose 14% of the total population.
- It was the second leading cause of death for Hispanic men and the fourth leading cause for Latinas.
- Worldwide, 42 million persons are living with HIV/AIDS.
- While such statistics have decreased in other communities, they have increased in the Hispanic community.

**We have an epidemic** and as illustrated above, it has affected the church community as well. The church exists to reveal to the world the brokenness and compassion of the heart of God for those who are in need of God's love.